

prices are 30 percent higher than last year, and the cost of some home appliances has spiked nearly as much. Everyday essentials are getting pricier too. Milk is up 7 percent, and gas has jumped by more than 50 percent.

Consumers are feeling the real cost of what the White House Chief of Staff called “the most progressive domestic legislation in a generation.” But it didn’t have to be this way. These are exactly the conditions economists have been writing about and warning about for months.

Back in March, the Washington Post ran an ominous line:

For policy experts and even members of Biden’s own party, the improving picture is raising questions about whether the stimulus bill is mismatched—

Mismatched—

to the needs of the current moment.

Sure enough, not just any member of the President’s party but a top economist under both the last two Democratic administrations, Larry Summers, cautioned even earlier that a massive spending plan like the one Democrats were proposing could “set off inflationary pressures of a kind we have not seen in a generation.” Prescient, to say the least. That is exactly what has happened.

These exact fears have been realized, and experts are still clear about the source of the problem. “Labor shortages are the last thing that we need” with inflation on the rise. Until very recently, the White House has been unwilling to connect these dots.

States have been on their own to turn off the perverse incentives driving the shortages. To date, 25 States have done so, announcing suspensions of excessive Federal unemployment supplements. But across the country, Main Street has already been feeling the pinch.

In my State of Kentucky, the consequences of Democrats’ misguided spending are growing more serious. Small business owners in particular are nearing a breaking point. One restaurant owner in Clark County wrote to me to say that “each week it gets harder to create a full schedule. Restaurants are already reducing hours of operation. Next will come closing.”

I have heard the same story from constituents all over the Commonwealth. A sign manufacturer in Woodford County had to ask his staff to work as many as 10 hours of overtime each week just to keep up with demand. An outdoor supplies maker in McCracken County saw shipping costs quadruple in the past year. He can’t find a prospective employee who will even show up for an interview. He can’t even find a prospective employee who will show up for an interview. After 25 years of production, he is facing the prospect that his company may not be able to stay afloat.

The Commonwealth still has 90,000 fewer workers than we did before the pandemic. In the past year, the Consumer Price Index in Kentucky and

surrounding States has increased by a whopping 7 percent. The recovery teed up by smart, targeted, bipartisan policies last year has been buried under an ill-advised, self-inflicted avalanche—avalanche—of spending. Folks in Kentucky know all too well what happens when Democrats get carried away here in Washington. They know who ends up footing the bill back home.

Higher prices at the gas pump and the grocery store, just as families were hoping to put a year of sacrifices in the rearview mirror—these are the real-world effects of the Biden administration’s multitrillion-dollar economic debacle. These are the effects that Republicans and nonpartisan experts have warned about literally for months.

The American people are, nevertheless, resilient. Job creators, innovators, and skilled workers are ready. But as our economy slowly gets back up to speed, it certainly won’t be because Democrats stroked an outsized check; it will be in spite of it.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today President Biden had the first of his meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He certainly has many important messages to convey to Mr. Putin about ongoing cyber attacks against us and our allies, the murdering of peaceful political opponents, and potential areas where we may be able to work together to deal with nuclear proliferation. The important discussion comes after several days where President Biden reaffirmed our relationship with our most important allies, those in the G7 and NATO. There were important announcements about leading the global COVID vaccine effort and standing up to the outrages perpetrated by nations around the world. But perhaps what was most important was that President Biden reasserted America’s role as a leading champion of democracy, security, and international norms.

I hope this spells an end—and I believe it does—of the unimaginable events that occurred in the previous administration: Coddling a foreign dictator such as Putin, dismissing our closest allies, and threatening the critical North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

President Biden knows that America’s leadership and its example are critical in leading shared efforts to stop this pandemic, tackle climate change, push back on rogue nations, and maintain global norms of behavior. President Biden also knows that how we manage our democracy here at home affects our ability to lead abroad.

The last administration bullied our allies, who watched in disbelief as it cozied up to the autocrats around the world. I have often said that a great deal of America’s influence around the world comes from the power of its ideals and values—critical and precious assets that we must nurture and never take for granted.

Our historic peaceful transfer of power has been a marvel for generations for much of the world. I will never forget the power and emotion felt walking with my friend the late Senator John McCain through Ukraine’s Maidan square, looking at the makeshift memorials to those who lost their lives hoping for a free and democratic Ukraine.

John McCain once said:

America’s greatest strength has always been its hopeful vision of human progress.

I couldn’t agree more. I couldn’t be more proud that President Biden is reaffirming this belief on the world stage this week. So let me take this moment to commend the President and his team for a timely, critical, and important visit with international allies and adversaries in recent days. It won’t solve all the problems we face, but we can be proud of this example of American leadership, generosity, and decency.

JUNETEENTH

Mr. President, this Saturday is Juneteenth, the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the end of slavery in America. Our Founders were brilliant and brave about many, many things, but they lacked the wisdom, perhaps the courage, maybe even the resolve, to face a poisonous contradiction at the heart of our new Nation. How could this Nation, founded on the belief that all people are created equal, condone and allow human slavery? Many of our Founding Fathers owned slaves themselves.

Eighty-five years after our founding, that unresolved contradiction plunged America into civil war. Halfway through that war, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that all persons held in bondage in rebellious States “are, and henceforth shall be free.”

His action meant little to most enslaved people in America. Most of those held in bondage didn’t gain freedom for another 2 years after the Civil War ended. For the 250,000 men, women, and children enslaved in the State of Texas, the wait was even longer. They learned of their freedom on June 19, 1865, 2 months after the Civil War ended, when Army MG Gordon Granger and 2,000 Union troops marched into Galveston, TX, with orders to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation.

One year later, African Americans in Galveston held America’s first Juneteenth celebration to commemorate that moment when they knew of the end of slavery in America. Formerly enslaved people wore their finest clothes, read the Emancipation Proclamation, and prayed together.

Later, as African Americans in Galveston and other parts of the South joined the great migration north, they carried that Juneteenth memory with them, giving the celebration new roots in Chicago, Los Angeles, and scores of other cities.

Today, Juneteenth is celebrated as a State holiday or day of observance in 47 States, including my State of Illinois and in the District of Columbia.

Yesterday, this Senate approved unanimously the resolution honoring Juneteenth as a national day of reflection and celebration. In this moment in time in our divided Nation, that unanimous recognition of the importance of Juneteenth is a balm to our national soul.

#### FILIBUSTER

As America prepares to celebrate Juneteenth 2021, we must also remember that the “absolute equality,” promised at that first Juneteenth in 1865, has too often been denied to African Americans.

Just a year after the Civil War ended, Southern States enacted the “Black Codes,” State laws meant to preserve White supremacy. In response, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, guaranteeing African Americans due process of law and Black men the right to vote.

Unbowed, Southern States invented Jim Crow laws, creating new hurdles to voting and participation that made it nearly impossible for many African Americans to exercise their voting rights and other basic rights of citizenship.

As the great activist W.E.B. DuBois wrote in his essay “Black Reconstruction in America,” “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun and moved back down again toward slavery.”

This betrayal of the promise of freedom for African Americans was possible, in part, because of misguided Court decisions by the Supreme Court, especially the infamous 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson ruling, which enshrined the concept of “separate but equal.” That odious decision stood for more than 50 years as the law of the land, making racial discrimination both legal and enforceable.

The betrayal of equality for African Americans also was abetted by southern segregationist Senators who wielded the filibuster as a weapon for decades to stop civil rights measures in Congress.

I know our Senate minority leader and some of his colleagues on the other side get upset when anyone utters the words “filibuster” and “Jim Crow” too close together. They insist that the filibuster has nothing to do with race. Well, history, in fact, proves otherwise.

Historian Sarah Binder is a leading expert on the filibuster. According to her analysis, of the 30 measures between 1917 and 1994 that were killed on this Senate floor by the filibuster, “exactly half addressed [the issue of] civil

rights . . . including measures to authorize Federal investigation and prosecution of lynching, [banning] the imposition of poll taxes, and [prohibiting] discrimination on the basis of race and housing.” That total doesn’t count other major civil rights measures, such as the Civil Rights Acts of 1967 and 1964, which passed only after lengthy filibusters by segregationist Senators.

Today, Senator MCCONNELL is vowing to use the filibuster, if necessary, to protect a flood of new State voting laws that are as racially discriminatory as we have seen since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 officially barred Jim Crow from American elections. After record numbers of Americans braved a deadly pandemic to vote in the 2020 elections, Republican-controlled State legislatures are rushing to pass new laws to make it harder—not easier, harder—for millions of Americans to vote, especially people of color.

Supporters of these new voter suppression laws cite the Big Lie as their justification, Donald Trump’s dangerous, discredited claim that the 2020 Presidential election was somehow stolen from him. That Big Lie has been rejected by State election officials of both parties, by our Nation’s top election security experts, and by every Federal judge it has faced, including several appointed by President Trump himself. Sixty times President Trump went to Federal courts with his Big Lie, and 60 times he lost.

Despite all of that, Senator MCCONNELL and many of our Republican colleagues have vowed to filibuster our measure, known as the For the People Act, which includes provisions to protect voting rights, defend the integrity of elections, prevent billionaires from buying elections, and strengthening ethics.

Their opposition to protecting the right to vote doesn’t end there. Senator MCCONNELL has also said he will oppose the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, a bill that Senator LEAHY and I are working on in the Senate Judiciary Committee, that would restore and strengthen the protections of the Voting Rights Act.

I will say this. In all fairness to the minority leader, his use of the filibuster is not limited to matters of civil rights and racial justice. Senator MCCONNELL has transformed the filibuster from a rarely used tactic to a weapon of frequent mass obstruction.

When Barack Obama was elected President in 2008, our Nation was teetering on the edge of a second Great Depression, and Senator MCCONNELL said his top priority was to make President Obama “a one-term President.” Not to rescue the economy—no, that wasn’t his top priority. Not to help people who had lost their homes or business. Senator MCCONNELL’s No. 1 priority was to make President Obama a one-term President. He would do that by dramatically increasing the use of filibusters in order to deny the new President every possible achievement.

Fast-forward to this year. President Biden is sworn in during an epidemic that has killed hundreds of thousands of Americans and sent our economy into deep recession, and Senator MCCONNELL was quoted again saying: “100 percent of our focus is on stopping this new Administration.” Not stopping the virus nor the economic devastation we are facing, but stopping the new administration. Again, the weapon of choice for Senator MCCONNELL is the filibuster.

Three weeks ago, 42 Republican Senators stood with Senator MCCONNELL and filibustered a bill to create an independent, bipartisan commission to investigate the deadly January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. This independent Commission’s mission would have been to examine the attack on the Capitol and the events leading up to it. Fifty-six Senators, a clear majority, supported creation of the January 6 Commission. It wasn’t enough. We needed 60 votes. Senator MCCONNELL’s filibuster prevailed again.

For those who argue that the filibuster encourages bipartisan cooperation, let me tell you: The January 6 Commission bill was the result of intense bipartisan compromise. Negotiations were worked out by top Republicans and Democrats in the House, and it was filibustered by Senator MCCONNELL regardless.

The Commission would have been more comprehensive and less political than the inquiries into the insurrection being conducted by congressional committees. Like the 9/11 Commission, the January 6 Commission would have subpoena authority to get to the truth.

For a short while, Senator MCCONNELL said he would keep an open mind about whether to support the bill. The night before the House voted to create the Commission, however, former President Donald Trump posted a screed on his blog denouncing the Commission as a “Democratic Trap.” That was all Senator MCCONNELL needed to hear. The former President demanded that Republicans reject the Commission and added: “MITCH MCCONNELL and KEVIN MCCARTHY, I hope you’re listening.” Well, it turns out that they were.

The next day—after 35 House Republicans joined Democrats to create this January 6 Commission—Senator MCCONNELL announced that he was going to filibuster it and oppose it. He asked members of his caucus, as a personal favor, to support his filibuster of the January 6 Commission.

This is where the abuse of the filibuster has brought us. We aren’t able to break through the partisan gridlock even to investigate the worst attack on the Capitol of the United States of America in more than 200 years. How can anyone believe, after that shameful vote, that protecting the filibuster as it is currently misused is protecting our democracy? Cynical, overuse of the filibuster imperils our democracy. There has got to be a better way.